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SUBJECT: CYPRUS/NATO: EP REPORT PUTS GOVERNMENT ON DEFENSIVE OVER PFP

Classified By: DCM Jonathan Cohen, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: A recently-approved European Parliament (EP) report on EU-NATO relations has sent Cypriot President Demetris Christofias and his Communist AKEL party into another anti-Alliance tizzy. Of concern to the government was a last-minute amendment, tabled by a right-leaning Cypriot European Parliamentarian (MEP), calling on Cyprus to review its opposition to, and apply for membership in, the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Government spin-control began immediately after the report's approval on February 19, with Christofias claiming that PfP membership for Cyprus ran counter to his vision of a demilitarized island. All parties save AKEL have restated their support for PfP. Politically cornered, Christofias and AKEL's opposition to the Alliance likely will spike, making a Cypriot application to PfP even more remote in the short- to medium term. END SUMMARY.

Parliamentary Procedure Leaves Government Fuming

¶12. (U) News of the pending European Parliament report broke locally on February 19. Brussels-based Cypriot journalists wrote that the study, penned by French MEP Ari Vatanen, concerned the role of NATO within the security framework of the EU. The EP's Foreign Affairs Committee had adopted an amendment proposed by Cypriot MEP Yiannakis Matsis that called on the RoC to reconsider its current stance and apply for membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace. Pundits predicted a close fight in the EP plenary; Cypriot MEPs were divided, the two AKEL parliamentarians opposing adoption of the report and the remaining four supporting it.

¶13. (SBU) Vatanen's report was endorsed on February 19 by a vote of 293-283 with 60 abstentions. An accompanying EP press release deplored that "the Turkey-Cyprus dispute continues to badly impair the development of EU-NATO cooperation, given that Turkey refuses to allow Cyprus to participate in European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) missions involving NATO intelligence, while Cyprus refuses to allow Turkey to engage in the overall development of ESDP to an extent commensurate with Turkey's military weight and strategic importance."

Delight in Being Odd Man Out -- A Bit of Background

¶14. (C) President Demetris Christofias's AKEL is Europe's pound-for-pound champion Communist party. As AKEL Secretary General, a post he abandoned only in January, Christofias displayed a passion for NATO-bashing, blaming the organization for many of the world's ills. Rhetorical levels dropped only slightly his election to the presidency in

February 2008; in a November official visit to Moscow, the Soviet-educated President basked in declaring himself "Europe's Red Sheep," promised to promote in EU fora Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's proposal for a new European security architecture, and told the press that Cyprus would have no links with NATO as long as he was around. Despite Moscow's own membership in PfP, AKEL dogma remains rigid towards the Alliance. In fact, in a 2007 meeting with PolChief, newly-elected Secretary General Andros Kyprianou claimed that AKEL's two strongest "OXIs" were NO to casino gambling and NO to PfP. Kyprianou told media on February 24 that NATO violates international law and the UN charter, and is "an aggressive organization that has scattered death and destruction in many corners of the world."

¶ 15. (C) AKEL stands alone among mainstream Greek Cypriot parties in its opposition to all things NATO. Coalition mate EDEK, for example, long has included PfP membership among its party priorities, while DIKO and opposition DISY also voice support. In the run-up to the February 2008 elections, party leaders and staff of both then-incumbent President Tassos Papadopoulos and challenger Ioannis Kasoulides's campaign teams promised us that, if elected, a PfP application would come in the first six months in office -- although both men predicted Turkey would veto it. Senior Greek Cypriot National Guard officers as well as Ministry of Defense officials also favor accession to PfP, seeing the Partnership as vital to improve their force's capabilities and inter-operability with European militaries.

No Hesitation in Opposing

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¶ 16. (C) In the face of the Vatanen report's adoption, Government Spokesman Stephanos Stephanou on February 19 said that the government, "confronted with the ongoing Turkish invasion and occupation and engaged in settlement talks," preferred to pursue demilitarization to filing an application to join a "military organization." (Note: Christofias's visible appearance February 20 at Russian Armed Forces Day calls into question his ideological commitment to demilitarization.) Stephanou further claimed that the government would not seek PfP membership because the President had not included the step in his election program. Responding two days later to critics of his Partnership stance who claimed that Cyprus was isolated in Europe and AKEL isolated in Cyprus, Christofias argued the he felt no pressures. "PfP is not a European institution, but a NATO one. We are not bound to join." His ideologically-distant predecessors Papadopoulos and Glafcos Clerides had opted not to bring Cyprus closer to the Alliance, the President added.

¶ 17. (U) Opposition DISY and EUROKO as well as pro-government EDEK and DIKO all shot back. DIKO leader and House President Marios Karoyian called for Cyprus's PfP application soonest, although he acknowledged the decision belonged solely to the government. EUROKO spokesman Rikkos Erotokritou called on "stubborn" AKEL to realize that Cyprus's non-participation in the Partnership excluded it from exploiting strategic advantages that arose from the island's geographic location. EDEK faced a more difficult task in convincing the Cypriot electorate that it continued to favor PfP even though it apparently had not lobbied for the Vatanen report with fellow European Socialists. DISY House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Averof Neophytou was pushing for plenary discussion regarding Cyprus's stance, according to media reports.

Comment

¶ 18. (C) Googling Christofias or Kyprianou's pre-2008 public statements, one finds a trove of "NATO equals death," "Down

with imperialism," and "Yankee go home." While its rise to power has tempered that message slightly, AKEL has not gone the way of East Bloc Communist parties to become a Social Democratic force -- the hammer-and-sickle still flies proudly outside party HQ and East-West ideology remains square in the party mantra. We therefore doubt AKEL would abandon its anti-PfP stance even if overwhelming public opinion demanded an application.

¶ 9. (C) Christofias's backbone has proven soft before, however, most visibly during AKEL's flip-flop over support for the 2004 Annan Plan. As for the party itself, AKEL not only dropped its opposition to Cyprus's EU accession early in the decade, but on two other occasions when it took "principled" stands to satisfy the bases -- its 2007 campaign against adopting the Euro, and its 2008 rejection of the Lisbon Treaty -- the party did so knowing the measures would pass regardless, owing to other parties' support for them. There can be no such passing the buck on PfP, since responsibility to file a membership would fall solely on Christofias and his government.

¶ 10. (C) The Euros plausibly could up the pressure on Cyprus to become a Partner, a la Vatanen, in hopes of improving EU-NATO coordination. Even Cyprus ally Russia might want another friend in PfP and urge Christofias to file. Were Christofias to do a 180 and apply, and were Turkey to do the currently unthinkable -- holster its veto and allow the bid to succeed -- it would beg our honest assessment of whether Nicosia's membership truly would improve cooperation between the EU and NATO. The answer would surely depend on the status of the Cyprus Problem talks and offers intriguing food for thought.

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